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## **FUTURE WAR PAPER**

### **SHAPING THE MARINE CORPS TODAY FOR ITS FUTURE ROLE IN WEST AFRICA ENGAGEMENT**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES

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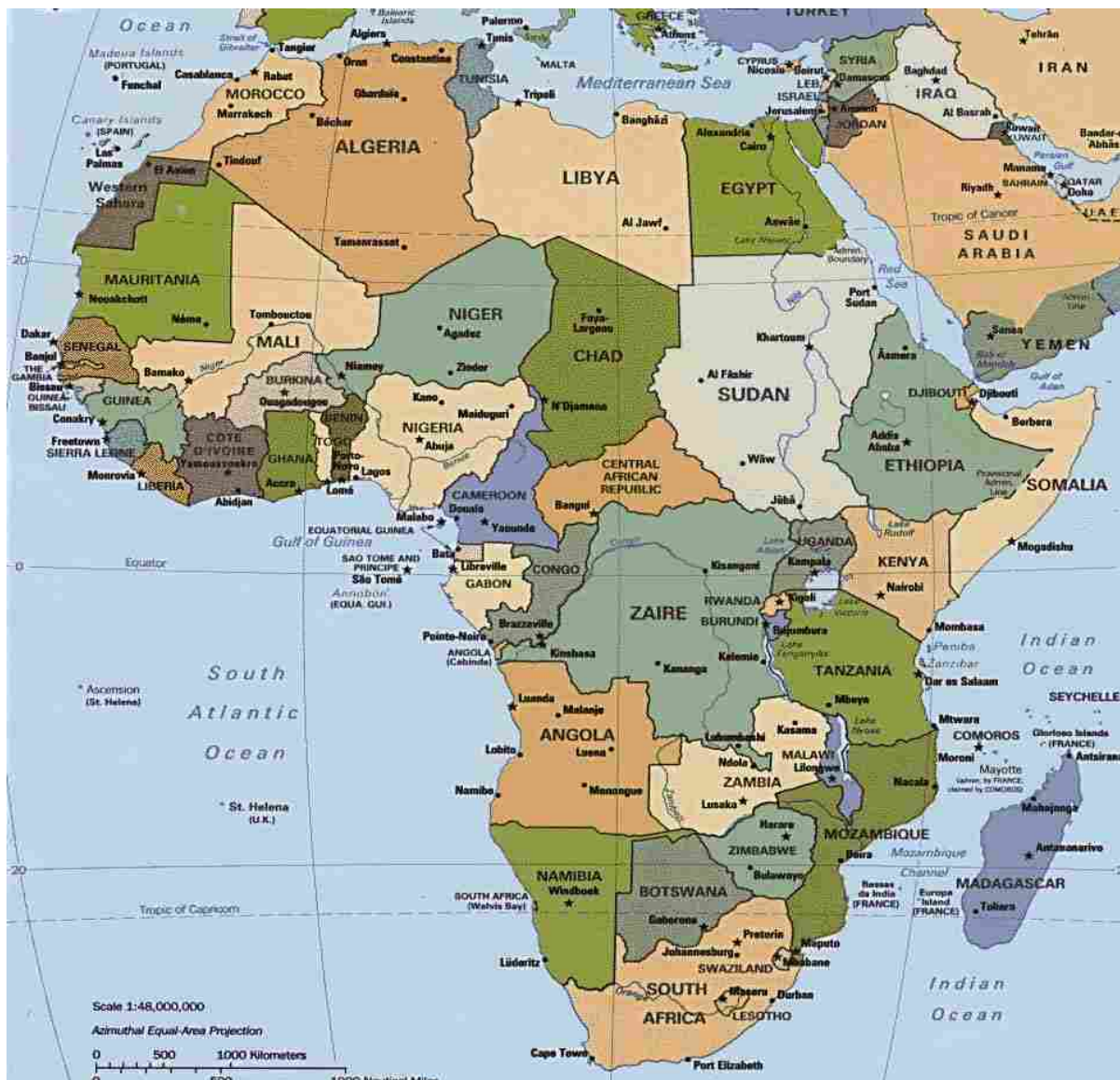
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## Map 1: The African Continent



## **Executive Summary**

Over the past several years, the United States Government (U.S.) has started to appreciate the strategic importance of Africa. However, because of patterns of ethnic violence, disease, terrorist activities, and other governmental and economic challenges, the future of Africa is uncertain. To combat this uncertainty, the US has begun to take a holistic approach toward achieving its strategic objectives regarding Africa. The Department of Defense will contribute to the U.S. government efforts by establishing a Geographic Combatant Command on the continent of Africa. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) will focus its effort on theatre security cooperation, building security capacity, improving governance, deterring aggression and responding to crises.

The Marine Corps, as the nation's Expeditionary Force in Readiness, will be a major participant in future U.S. efforts in Africa- particularly in the strategically important region of in West Africa. However, the future Marine Corps strategy, as outlined in the Marine Corps Long War Plan, is insufficient and requires refinement. As a result, by 2010, a dedicated task organized ESG and Special Purpose MAGTF should be assigned to the AFRICOM Theatre of Operations.

## **Chapter One**

### **Current Strategic Environment in west Africa**

#### **Background:**

The U.S.'s involvement in Africa is relatively new. During the cold war, the U.S. appreciated the strategic significance of Africa in the context of countering the Soviet Union. Specifically, U.S. forward presence was introduced to the region by establishing bases in countries like Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia. In addition, critical policy decisions were made to support Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia. All of these actions focused on countering the expansion of Soviet presence west.

The fact that the U.S. treated the African continent as a low strategic priority was directly related its necessity to focus on Europe and Asia. In addition, U.S. policy was influenced more by nation states that possessed comparable influence and power around the world, such as the Soviet Union. This emphasis on the Soviet Union, combined with a lack of comparable power in any of the 54 African nations, resulted in an accepted shortfall in U.S. African policy.<sup>1</sup> In a nutshell, the policy for Africa was simply to prevent conflict that might facilitate the expansion of Soviet influence on the Continent.

It was not until the end of the Cold War that the U.S. began to appreciate the strategic significance of the African Continent in the context of economics, humanitarianism and countering terrorism. The post cold war era brought about new challenges on the African Continent that the U.S. could not ignore. The challenges included wars of genocide in countries such as Rwanda and humanitarian crises in Somalia in addition to widespread disease and famine. These crises increased the world's

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<sup>1</sup> African Center for Strategic Studies, Overview of US Interests, Policies and Programs in Africa, (Washington D.C.) 21-22.

focus on Africa. For example, the HIV/AIDS pandemic<sup>2</sup> in Sub-Saharan Africa and the famine in Ethiopia began to attract the attention of Americans, Europeans and others across the globe. Information about the “African Crisis” also began to spread rapidly through multiple media outlets. National Geographic dedicated almost an entire edition to the breakout of malaria in the country of Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

As awareness of the African humanitarian crisis of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century grew, it influenced the political landscape in the U.S. The U.S. began to develop an African strategy oriented around humanitarian assistance, long-term economic development, governance and capacity-building designed to promote self-sustainment and effective continental crisis response.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Current US Africa Policy:**

The National Security Strategy of 2006 emphasized the important role that Africa now plays in the security of the U.S. According to the strategy, “Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority of this administration.” Moreover, the strategy is “to promote economic development and the expansion of effective, democratic governances so that African states can take the lead in addressing African Challenges.”<sup>5</sup> In short, current U.S. Policy on Africa is based on three pillars.

Under the first pillar of the strategy, a “strategic” approach, the U.S. directly engages “anchor states” in each sub-region. The countries of South Africa, Nigeria,

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<sup>2</sup> Webster’s New World Dictionary. **Epidemic**: disease that spreads rapidly. **Pandemic**: disease that is epidemic in large areas.

<sup>3</sup> National Geographic: Michael Finkel, Raging Malaria, (National Geographic Magazine, Washington D.C.) 32-67.

<sup>4</sup> African Center for Strategic Studies, 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> George W. Bush, The National Security Strategy of the U.S. of America, (Washington D.C.), 37.



Kenya and Ethiopia have been labeled as anchor states because of their potential impact on regional stability. There is also support for sub-regional organizations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Lastly, under the strategic approach, an aggressive engagement with the African Union (AU) is emphasized. The AU, a continent-wide organization, is focused on the development and maintenance of democracy and good governance.<sup>6</sup>

The second pillar in the U.S. Strategy towards Africa involves the establishment of clear policy objectives consisting of three major priorities. First, there is an effort to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic prevalent across the continent. The statistics relating to this disease are staggering. Africa has ten percent of the world's population, but has two-thirds of the world's 40 million Aids cases.<sup>7</sup> The second priority is to advance political and economic freedom. This objective is achieved through supporting such organizations as the Economic Community of West African States (EOWAS)<sup>8</sup>. The third priority is to promote peace and regional security. The African Stand-by Force (ASF)<sup>9</sup>, for example, is destined to play a pivotal role in accomplishing this third priority.

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<sup>6</sup> African Center for Strategic Studies, 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> Johnnie Carson ( Strategic Forum), Shaping U.S. Policy on Africa: Pillars of a New Strategy, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Washington D.C., 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Max Boot, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Marine in Africa Draft, pg 18-19. The main objectives of this organization are to promote economic, social, and cultural cooperation and integration, raise the standard of living of its peoples, maintain economic stability and foster relations to contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent.

<sup>9</sup> Max Boot, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Marine in Africa Draft, pg 22. The ASF is headquartered in Addis Araba, Ethiopia and its mission is to quickly respond to crisis and conduct peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations. The goal is to eventually have military forces consisting of a headquarters and a brigade in each of the five Regional Economic Commissions (RECs).

The third pillar upon which the current US Policy in Africa is based is the development of the principles of bilateral engagement. The three basic tenets to this pillar are the promotion of good governance, economic reform and the promotion of health and education.

The three pillars supporting the U.S. strategy toward Africa set the foundation for future U.S. involvement on the African continent for years to come. Moreover, the pillars establish guidelines for engaging individual regions with focused efforts based on regional challenges. West Africa is a region that retains its own set of unique challenges.

### **West Africa**

The West African region is comprised of twenty two countries. The region's most recent history is one of conflict, poverty, disease, and instability, making it ripe for the development of safe havens for international terrorists and other criminal elements. Moreover, the region also possesses large commodity reserves, including oil, natural gas and strategic minerals, making it vulnerable to intense competition between nation states over these natural resources. In addition, governments within the region continually struggle for legitimacy, which makes economic and social development challenging at best. Simply put, the region is prime for economic development as well as global economic competition, which elevates the region's strategic importance to the U.S.

The two largest states in the region are Nigeria with approximately 135 million people and Ghana (the most developed state in the region), with approximately 23 million people. Although well developed, both nations deal with high infant mortality rates and endemic diseases such as malaria.<sup>10</sup> The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also a significant

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<sup>10</sup> National Geographic: Michael Finkel, 32-67.

problem in the region. Nigeria has a 5.4 percent infection rate which equates to approximately seven million people. The prevalence of disease in West Africa tends to incapacitate the development of organizations such as militaries and/or police forces. Disease, therefore, presents a destabilizing effect to West African nations.

The Natural resources in the West Africa are vast, yet vulnerable. Among the natural resources found in the region are rubber, diamonds, and cocoa; however, the most important resource to the global market is oil. Nigeria is the largest producer of oil in the region, exporting over 40% of its oil to the U.S. annually.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore this “sweet crude” is more easily refined into gasoline and diesel fuel than standard crude. The ease of refinement, as well as its proximity to U.S. refineries, puts it in high demand. In addition to oil, the U.S. imports a large amount of hydrocarbons from the region that can be used in the development of electronics. For example, in 2005 the U.S. imported over 30 billion barrels of hydrocarbon from Nigeria and Angola.<sup>12</sup>

The vulnerability of these resources is of great concern, which is deepened by the instability within the governments of those states that produce the majority of the region’s vital resources. Poor economic planning combined with wide-spread corruption have become root causes for insurgent, criminal and terrorist activity in the region. The World Bank recently described Nigeria as a “fragile state,” at constant risk to armed conflict, epidemic disease, and failed governance.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, despite oil production Nigeria imports most of its fuel because of infrastructure decay and sabotage. Although,

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<sup>11</sup> National Geographic: Tom O’Neill, (National Geographic Magazine, Washington D.C.) 88-117.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Peter Pham: Director of the Nelson Institute, Diplomacy in Africa: Securing America’s Interests and Promoting a Continent’s Development, (Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs at James Madison University), 1-20

<sup>13</sup> National Geographic: Tom O’Neill, 88-117.

West Africa has great potential for economic prosperity because of its resources, most nations in the region lack the legitimate government necessary to transition their potential into prosperity. Thus, the lack of legitimate governments and government institutions contribute to the West African Region being labeled as a potential future “flashpoint”.

Yet another factor contributing to the instability in the region is the lack of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The Gulf, which is the size of the Gulf of Mexico, contains rich oil deposits that are tapped by off-shore oil rigs. These rigs, combined with the Gulf’s role as the primary commerce route for the region’s rich resources, make the area extremely vulnerable to domestic, regional and international threats. In fact, criminal activity in the Gulf of Guinea resulted in \$2 billion dollars of financial losses to the West Africa Region, leading to severe economic and political consequences.<sup>14</sup>

The specific threats to stability in the Gulf range from piracy to poaching. Nigerian waters are especially dangerous. Attacks in these waters have doubled in the past year, making the area the third most dangerous in the world for shipping traffic.<sup>15</sup> The lack of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea negatively impacts the internal economies of states in the region. Moreover, if the insecurity is not neutralized it will greatly impact the export of oil to the U.S. This will, in turn, limit the energy diversity of the U.S. In conclusion, the Gulf of Guinea is of strategic importance to the U.S. because of its natural resources, and is ripe for future engagement missions because of its instability.

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<sup>14</sup> J9 Futures Group, West Africa, 1-7.

<sup>15</sup> J9 Futures Group, West Africa, 1-7.

## **Future Strategic Environment**

The “West African sub-region will play an increasingly important role in global energy markets, providing more than one-quarter of North American oil imports by 2015, thus surpassing the total volume of oil imports from the middle east.”<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding the good news regarding energy, the negative aspect of the situation in Africa, specifically West Africa, are unlikely to change over the next fifteen to twenty years. The region’s stability will remain vulnerable because of volatile governments, internal conflict, disease, and acts of terrorism. In addition, the increased global competition for the region’s vast natural resources will likely exacerbate its problems. The combination of all these factors paints a bleak picture for the future of West Africa. As a result, success in West Africa will continue be a strategic imperative for the U.S. for the foreseeable future.

The decline in effective and stable governances will continue, because of continued internal conflict with insurgent groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta in Nigeria (MEND),<sup>17</sup> corruption and the rise of religious conflict. In addition, the need for international aid may result in policy decisions that are influenced by the nations providing aid. Finally, nations that were once regionally focused, like China and India, will continue to develop as global competitors in a quest to exploit the vast natural resources of the West Africa Region.

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<sup>16</sup> Dr. Peter Pham: Director of the Nelson Institute, Diplomacy in Africa: Securing America’s Interests and Promoting a Continent’s Development, (Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs at James Madison University), 1-20

<sup>17</sup> National Geographic: Tom O’Neill, 88-117.

Internal strife in West African States will also continue. Everyday violence resulting from an increase in unemployed and impoverished citizens will remain. This increased violence will lead to a rise in crime rates and an increase in general insecurity.<sup>18</sup> Religious conflict will also be a major contributor to instability. Yet, this conflict will remain simply a destabilizing factor.

HIV/AIDs will also continue to exist over the next fifteen to twenty years. Technological advances and newly developed vaccines could potentially reduce the destabilizing effect this disease has on governmental organizations. However, even if the HIV/AIDS epidemic becomes more controlled, government organizations such as armies and local security forces will continue to atrophy as a result of disease.

The results of globalization will also play a major role in the future of Africa and will impact potential U.S. strategy. India and China have commenced a transition from regional to global power. These nations will continue to strike trade agreements with African Nations in an effort to benefit from the abundance of natural resources, which could cause a negative impact in Africa nations. China, for example, will likely flood African markets with cheap goods and import cheap labor. These actions would adversely impact local economies.<sup>19</sup> Most fundamentally, as European Powers continue to vacate the African continent, former regional powers will fill the void in an effort to become peer competitors of the U.S.

However, the future of the West Africa region is not entirely bleak. The world has now begun to focus on a region of the world that traditionally has been neglected.

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<sup>18</sup> National Council Report 2020

<sup>19</sup> Max Boot, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Marine in Africa Draft, 1-59.

The potential wealth of the region and the opportunity to further democracy has opened the door for the U.S. to actively engage African nations in developing partnerships that are beneficial to all.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The United Marine Corps' present role in West Africa**

Current Marine Corps contributions to U.S. Africa Strategy consist of participation in CJTF Horn of Africa, Foreign Internal Defense (FID) missions, and the Africa Partnership Station (APS)<sup>20</sup>. The Corps' proposed future role entails the implementation of the Marine Corps' Long War Plan, focusing on Security Cooperation MAGTFs (SCMAGTFs). These current and proposed future contributions, although useful, reveal capability gaps in the implementation of US Strategy.

The CJTF-HOA mission is centered on the Horn of Africa and the eastern littorals of Africa. Headquartered at Camp LeMonier in Djibouti, CJTF-HOA seeks to develop capacity by training, equipping, and assisting governments in the region. In addition to participation in CJTF-HOA, Marine Corps Special Advisory Groups from MARSOC execute FID missions throughout the continent. Finally, the Marine Corps has deployed a platoon in support of the Navy's APS in the Gulf of Guinea.

In the future, the Marine Corps plan calls for a more enduring presence on the continent. Specifically, SCMAGTFs formed around an infantry battalion will deploy to Africa to conduct capacity building missions. The plan has several shortfalls. First, it is grounded in distributed operations. These operations will have small units operating at

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<sup>20</sup> The Africa Partnership Station is part of Naval Forces Europe Africa engagement plan. The deployment focuses on building capacity in the Gulf of Guinea Region and is a potential precursor to Global Fleet Station implementation.

significant distances from their base of support, which will undermine the MAGTF's ability to sustain and rapidly reinforce the force. Second, the plan is based heavily on the establishment of advanced naval bases and Global Fleet Stations, which will degrade operational flexibility, timely resupply and reinforcement operations. The most obvious shortfall is the lack of command and control capability. The planned architecture simply does not support the synchronization of operations throughout the continent. Moreover, an infantry battalion without significant augmentation cannot effectively control the other elements of the MAGTF.

U.S. Contributions to regional stability in the Horn of Africa and throughout the remainder of the continent have been notable. However, as a result of a lack of integration, the efforts seem somewhat disjointed. The development of AFRICOM is the first step to integrating these efforts, but a command and control gap will continue to exist without an organization like CJTF-HOA in regions such as West Africa.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Shaping today in order to succeed tomorrow**

The Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sea Power states that “The Marine Corps will continue to be employed as Marine Air Ground Task Forces operating from amphibious ships to conduct a variety of missions...”<sup>21</sup> The implementation of the guidance put forth by the commandant of the Marine Corps, Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commandant of the Coast Guard will be critical to successful engagement in

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<sup>21</sup> James Conway, Gary Roughhead, Thad Allen, A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower, (Pentagon, Washington D.C.), 13



West Africa. This chapter will introduce a conceptual framework for success in West Africa. Specifically, it will address unity of effort from operations to tactics. Second, it will introduce operational maneuver using a Task Organized Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) and MEU with specific skills to affect a successful engagement strategy.

### **Potential solutions to the “capability gap”:**

#### **Command and Control**

The development of a standing Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Headquarters in West Africa will enhance command and control, unity of effort in security cooperation, and crisis response planning for the Africa Region. The CJTF Headquarters must align itself functionally with U.S. Africa Command to be effective and capable of establishing long term relationships and consistent policy in the region.

The current success of CJTF HOA demonstrates the need for a similar effort in West Africa. It is clear that the solution to the command and control shortfall is the establishment of a standing CJTF headquarters. These headquarters guarantees the coordination of strategic, operational and tactical objectives through the use of effective campaign planning. Moreover, these headquarters could unify the efforts of the SPMAGTF, MCTAG, SOF, Maritime Forces, DOS and NGOs, so that proper assessment, coordination and execution can move the entire region forward<sup>22</sup>.

#### **Assignment of Marine Forces**

The force alignment and structure could take many forms. One option is that the Navy and Marine Corps could stand up a fourth MEU and ESG based on the east coast model. This MEU/ESG would possess the core competencies of the current MEU model and be dedicated to the AFRICOM area of operation. This first course of action is the

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<sup>22</sup> USMC Long War Pamphlet.

most advantageous to the region and seems to be the easiest and most obvious answer. However, it is also the most unlikely answer as it is improbable that the Navy and Marine can provide the manpower and amphibious shipping to produce a fourth standing east coast MEU.

The USMC Long War Pamphlet proposes establishing Security Cooperation MAGTFs.<sup>23</sup> This plan is grounded in a MAGTF concept, with Global Fleet Station and advanced naval base support. In addition, the base unit for the MAGTF would be a Battalion Landing Team (BLT) with security cooperation as its core competency. The obvious shortfalls to this course of action are its lack of crisis response capability and its limited ability to command and control a MAGTF.

A more responsible and supportable solution consists of the creation of a task organized Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) and Special Purpose MAGTF to be assigned to the Africa Area of Operations on a rotational basis. The Africa ESG/SPMAGTF team would possess an ability to use amphibious ships as a base of operations, command and control operations ashore, embark a variety of equipment such as general engineering assets, conduct maritime security operations in areas such as the Gulf of Guinea, disperse for security cooperation missions and rapidly concentrate to respond to situations such as a humanitarian crisis. The Africa ESG/SPMAGTF, using the sea as maneuver space, would possess a proven rapid response capability. The Navy and Marine Corps team should continue to operate from the sea and not transition to advanced naval bases, which restrain commanders during execution of assigned missions.

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<sup>23</sup> USMC Long War Pamphlet.

## **Force Structure**

The task organization of the ESG must be such that it is organized to quickly respond to crisis, project power, Sea Control, Maritime Security and support SPMAGTF missions. The ESG must be capable of distributed operations throughout the African Continent to support security cooperation missions or crisis response, while also maintaining appropriate force protection measures. Moreover, the ESG must have two capable command and control platforms, an HSV and a riverine capability. These platforms would allow the SPMAGTF to conduct simultaneous operations throughout the area of operations without degradation to its command and control capability. In addition, the HSV craft would enhance the SPMAGTF's intra-theatre lift capability decrease response time to crisis and add greater lift capacity. The riverine craft capability would facilitate the ability to transition from blue water to brown water operations. Figure 1 displays the make-up of the Africa ESG and its associated capabilities.

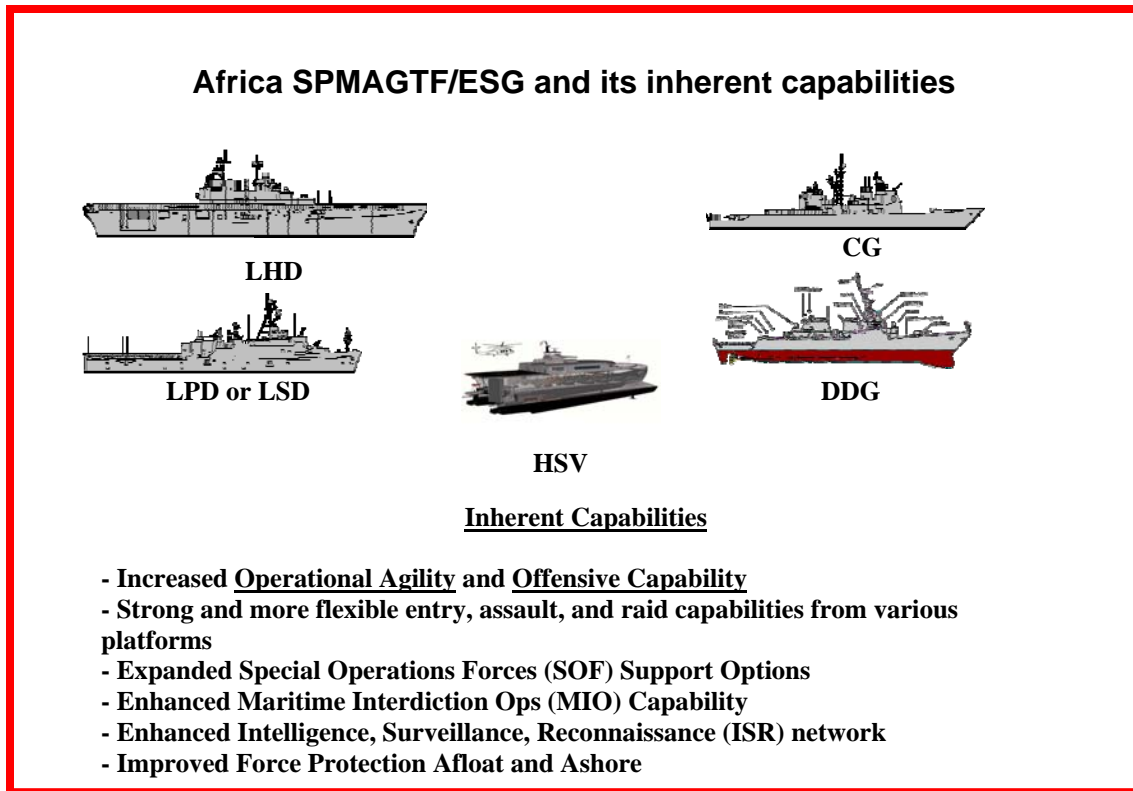


Figure 1

The Task Organization and mission skill sets of the Africa SPMAGTF must be refined to deal with Africa-specific missions. To this end, the task organization of the Africa SPMAGTF must organize under the commander of an Infantry regimental headquarters. The Marine Corps Long War plan recommends that the Second Marine Regiment maintain a regional focus on Africa and would rotate an infantry battalion as the base unit and commander of the SCMAGTF. However, an infantry battalion does not have the capability to command a MAGTF effectively unless the battalion is significantly reinforced by the Regiment, Division, and or MEF. Therefore, the Second, Sixth and Eighth Marine Headquarters should rotate as the SPMAGTF Command Element, which would enable a regional focus with an appropriate level of warfighting headquarters.

The base unit for the SPMAGTF should remain a Battalion Landing team (BLT), from the Regiment, assigned as the command element. The remainder of the SPMAGTF should consist of a Combat Logistics Company and Composite Rotary Wing Helicopter. In addition, the use of a task organized Naval Construction Detachment would enhance the capability of the force. Most importantly, the SPMAGTF would be scalable. Its relationship to the MEF headquarters would allow it to act as the enabling force for a larger MAGTF when a significant crisis occurs in the region.

### **ESG and SPMAGTF Core Competencies**

The ESG skill sets must include providing maritime security and security cooperation missions, while maintaining an ability to conduct crisis response. The core capabilities of this Africa ESG should include: Power Projection, Sea control, Maritime Interdiction, Maritime Special Operations, Enabling Operations, Supporting Operations, JTF-Enabler Capability and Maritime Security Cooperation. The SPMAGTF must possess the proper skill sets to successfully engage in Africa, while maintaining an ability to conduct crisis response as the base unit to a larger MAGTF much like the MEUs do today. This Africa SPMAGTF, should incorporate most of the core capabilities of the current MEU, but adapt the training of these core competencies to the Africa AOR.

### **ESG and SPMAGTF Special Skill Sets:**

The ESG/SPMAGTF will need to incorporate new skills and integrate skilled specialists into its training in order to be successful in executing security cooperation missions. These additional skills should include: instructor capabilities, operational culture, basic utilities training, foreign language training, civil affairs planning, MEDCAP, DENCAP, VETCAP, small arms weapons training, and enhanced

communications training. This list is not all-inclusive, but is aligned with SOTAG and MCTAG current competencies. With further study and regional focus, the ESG and SPMAGTF would develop a level of unit consistency in its skills that would improve mission accomplishment.

The West Africa region requires a strategy that focuses on security cooperation. However, this strategy cannot “assume away” the volatile nature of the continent and the West African Region. Therefore, an ability to conduct operational maneuver, security cooperation, and execute crisis response can only be achieved through the creation of a task organized ESG and SPMAGTF.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Conclusion**

The US government has started to appreciate the strategic importance of Africa, and specifically the West African Region. However, the patterns of ethnic violence, disease, terrorist activities, and other governmental and economic challenges, will continue to plague of Africa. As a result, its future remains uncertain. What is certain, however, is that Africa will remain of strategic importance to the U.S.

The U.S. Military must continue to develop a long term plan for the African continent that goes beyond the establishment of U.S. AFRICOM. The military must take a comprehensive approach to link strategic, operational and tactical objectives by establishing a standby CJTF in the West Africa Region. The CJTF will promote unity of effort among allies, host nations, militaries and U.S Government Organizations, while building lasting relationships within the region.

The Navy and Marine Corps team must leverage their amphibious capability and expeditionary character taking a balanced approach to engagement, power projection and crisis response. This balanced approach will require refinements to training programs and current force structures. This effort must begin now.

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**Map 2: The West African Region**



**MAP 3: The African Continent with Emphasis on the Gulf of Guinea**

